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CALFED Bay-Delta Program

August 16, 2000

Mr. Steve Ritchie, Acting Executive Director
Cal-Fed Bay-Delta Program
1416 Ninth St., Suite 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Final Programmatic EIS/EIR

Dear Mr. Ritchie:

I am an apricot, cherry and peach grower from the Santa Clara Valley. Our family farms about 70 acres of orchards in Morgan Hill and we receive water for irrigation purposes from the Bureau of Reclamation via the Santa Clara Valley Water District. Although the Cal-Fed plan can seriously affect the availability of our irrigation water, my comments regarding the Cal-Fed plan relate to California's agricultural industry as a whole.

The Cal-Fed plan to convert nearly 250,000 acres of farmland to habitat and other uses is of great concern to me and many of my fellow farmers. A comprehensive study should be initiated to determine the environmental & economic impact of such a land conversion. Cal-Fed must seek ways to avoid converting farmland to other uses. Entire communities and groups of farm workers could be negatively affected by the Cal-Fed program.

I believe that in trying to protect the environment, the Cal-Fed plan could actually harm the environment. Many species of wildlife currently occupy the farmland Cal-Fed proposes to take out of production agriculture. This wildlife is present because of the habitat provided by farmers and ranchers. Historically, the government has not done an good job of protecting and repopulating these species. Cooperative arrangements with landowners have worked better.

Farmers & Ranchers can run wildlife-friendly, productive operations only if they have an adequate, reliable, and affordable water supply. Farmland will lose its value both as habitat and as a vital food resource for California's growing population.

Government already owns fifty percent of California's one hundred million acres. I believe the Cal-Fed plan should conduct its habitat-restoration work on existing government-owned land instead of converting even more private land to government ownership. California farmland is a natural resource of global importance and needs to remain in agricultural production.

As a farmer, I recognize and support the need to use water more efficiently and have installed, at great capital expense, a micro sprinkler irrigation system on our family's 70 acre orchard operation. California farmers as a whole have increased agricultural production by two-thirds since 1967, while using less water. Farmers generally don't need additional new water. But farmers recognize that the need to insure that there is enough water to satisfy Cal-Fed's environmental goals, especially in dry years will seriously impact the availability of water to California's farmers and ranchers. It is my feeling the only way to guarantee adequate water supplies for all uses, especially during droughts, is to capture more water during wet winters especially in above ground reservoirs. Farmers know the priorities for water are for environmental and urban uses. In years of water shortages farmers, farm workers and many small communities will suffer as a result of lost water supplies.

Last year at the sixteen Cal-Fed hearings held around the state 800 farmers, ranchers and their families and neighbors testified on behalf of California agriculture. These people are stewards of the environment, managing land and water that produces food, wildlife and oxygen. It is a great disappointment to me that Cal-Fed and its agencies have turned a deaf ear to the concerns of these California citizens.

Cal-Fed should not finalize its plan until citizens have adequate opportunity to review and comment upon it. It is too encompassing a plan to rush to implementation. For this reason, Cal-Fed should extend the comment period on the final EIS/EIR and also hold public hearings to explain what the plan actually does and how it will affect the people of California.

Sincerely,



Mitchell Mariani

cc: Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senator Barbara Boxer
Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren
Governor Gray Davis
State Sen. Bruce McPherson
Assemblyman Peter Frusetta
Santa Clara County Supervisor Don Gage
Santa Clara Valley Water District Board of Directors